

THE HONEST COVE

by Maurice Rowdon

GEORGES BORCHARDT, INC.

LITERARY AGENCY

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A Short Story

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'An honest sort of cove'. They said that about me to my face. It was my insignia at the office. An open face, an honest delivery. 'He couldn't lie if he tried'. And some amusement goes with that, as if lying and tricking were essential in the world we live in---particularly the world I work in. It takes me to all too many places, all too fast. I seem to live in aircraft. And now I've come to need it. Three days without that invigorating take-off is one day too many for me. I get a really phenomenal amount of work done at airports, and between plastic meals in the air. I have my little black case on my knee, and 'open my office' with a nice comfortable feeling every time, to read letters of introduction to the next sales headquarters in Las Palmas, Mexico City, Khartoum, Sidney.

My favourite trip of all was (for a time) Portugal. It came round about once every two months. A car whisked me straight from the airport to a villa sitting in its own garden (palm trees and a swimming pool, within the soothing sound of the sea), just eighty-five kilometres outside Lisbon. There my suitcases were out of the boot and in my own balconied, sun-dazzled suite before you could say jumbo jet. Those cases went up to the suite like I did--- in a steel lift, and the house only had two floors. I

think my hosts had that lift put in just to complete the hushed, streamline rhythm in which the household moved--- from the multiple pussy-footing servants to the revolving sunsoaker lielows round the swimming pool. There was nothing hushed or streamlined about the owners, though--- eighteen of them<sup>in</sup> all, counting the third-generation kids. They were the noisiest and untidiest crowd I ever got caught up with. And I loved it. I know about noise<sup>s</sup>, having kipped down in first-class echo-trapping hotels in Tokyo and Saigon. Now this Portuguese noise was special. You didn't hear it so much as absorb it. And you began to need it. The moment I arrived from the airport this fair-ground uproar took hold of me, and made jet-engines sound like a whisper. It consisted of children's noises (all ages), servants mistaking orders and cooks chopping and beef-bashing in the kitchen, coffee-grinders and waste-disposal units and water-pumping<sup>p</sup> engines, and splashings with screams from the swimming pool, and the arrival and departure of cars with their silencers trimmed to 'sound good'. And above all the family 'talking'. Of all the words to describe what that family did, 'talking' was just about the most feeble I could think of. It wasn't simply that they yelled, slapped the table, cleared their throats like mechanical saws starting up. They ~~==~~ yelled, slapped and throat-cleared together. How they ever got to know each other I cannot say, because they never listened. It was a fantastic eighteen-part chorus that only closed down (with an extraordinary abruptness like a film stopping in the middle of the story) around midnight. Now I am on the whole rather talk<sup>r</sup>ative, at least my associates say so. I mean I never

hide my feelings, unless of course it will lose me a sale. But at that house I could never get a word in edgewise. I became as silent as a Trappist. I just sat there, at the dining table, at the pool, in the smoking lounge, on the sun terrace, with a seventh-heaven smile all over my face.

And no one seemed to work. Since papa was a millionaire I suppose they didn't have to. Carlo, the only son, went to the office sometimes but it wasn't what I call work. It consisted of being whisked off to an air-conditioned business apartment at about eleven in the morning, to pass a few minutes at the telephone making arrangements for lunch at one of Lisbon's most expensive restaurants, and talking to the latest date. In an upholstered swivel chair too. I adored Carlo. He was everything I wanted to be. And every girl who clapped eyes on him seemed to agree. He had gorgeous black hair and an olive skin (still has no doubt), and tapering fingers that made the girls think he was sensitive as well as <sup>being</sup> Lisbon's fastest charmer.

The business was a family concern. But this is a poor way of describing one of the biggest finance corporations in the world, with its pie-seeking fingers in everything from car-hire to kitchen detergents. As for papa, he never went to the office. He controlled everything from his home telephone. He had about three offices in the house. There was a cabin with a desk and armchair and two phones by the pool. There was a leather-insulated annex to his bedroom. And in case a business call came through while he was eating, the dining room had a little annex too, soundproofed of course. As I say, I was as happy as a sandboy in all this, especially

as the family-firm accounted for quite a large slice of my business. My headquarters in L.A. (Los Angeles to you) were as bucked as billy goats when they saw the Lisbon orders flowing into London in an unprecedented escalation. And they'd always thought the English didn't work. 'The young ones must be different', they said---before calling London to suggest giving me a raise.

I am still trying to recover from the abrupt end of that dream. If only papa had eased his orders off grad-  
ually. I mean after I was no longer persona grata at the house. But he didn't. He cut them off from one day to the next. He transferred his credit with more than tele-graphic speed. 'What the hell did you do to him', L.A. asked over the long-distance, 'rape his daughter?' I wish I had done. I mean, anything better than what I actually did do. Which was next to nothing. You see, all I did was be an honest cove.

I never saw much of papa. He was always disappearing into a doorway inside a cloud of cigar smoke, on his way to the airport or the golf-course or to his Lisbon apart-ment where he kept a bird. His approval or otherw<sup>ise</sup> was the seal on everything the family did. He had approved of me, that morning three years ago when I happened to be in his son Carlo's office talking him into an account.

'Come and have a swim at my place', papa had said. 'My chauffeur'll pick you up in a couple of minutes'. It was my honest expression that did it, I suppose. In less than an hour I was lying flat-out by the pool, and a frosted dry Martini was waiting for me on a little table by my lie-low. Tempting aromas of lunch drifted between the palm

trees. After a week of this I could hardly remember my own name. Even my own wife I could hardly remember. Even my ten-months-old child.

Papa had white hair round the temples and a smoothly bronzed face, spare and lazily placid, with sharp black eyes that suddenly fixed themselves on you if you said something that touched on business in any way. Like Carlo he spoke well-nigh perfect English. If anything it was better than my own. And they certainly knew their Shakespeare better. Papa rarely smiled---never laughed. After two or three days at the house I began to realise why. He yearned for a grandson, and wanted to get Carlo married off as soon as possible. The only thing was that Carlo couldn't find the right girl, or rather papa couldn't find her for him. Hardly a Lisbon girl under twenty-five wouldn't have given ten years of her life to marry him. A dark male beauty with a fortune behind him, and flashing white teeth, and those hands, and the way he handled a car, not to mention other things! But his wife had to be out of the top drawer. She had to be a good son-giver. She had to combine so many things, this future mother of the future heir, that you could scour the whole of nubile Lisbon without finding her. Apparently papa had always had a thing about sons. I don't know if this is Portugese, or just him. But he felt rotten about only having one son, instead of an army<sup>of them</sup>. He said to me quite frankly, with Carlo in the room, that he was always worried that Carlo might kill himself in his car or get some awful disease, 'one son gives you lots of anxieties'. And Carlo agreed. He nodded solemnly. It seemed he wanted the son as much as his father did.

Not that he did much about it. I mean Carlo. He and I set the town alight most evenings of the week. We would purr our way towards Lisbon in his Mas<sup>s</sup>erati-Citroen, around dusk, passing every vehicle on the road and narrowly missing most of them. I marvelled at Carlo's driving. It was like the family talked---without listening. How other drivers got out of the way as fast as they did I shall never know. But I never felt the slightest fear. I knew that a special providence hovered round this twenty-year-old scion of Portugal's greatest money-spinning house. I basked in the glow---and shared the girls. We usually got back home round one or two in the morning, and papa's amused and condoning eyes would be waiting for us in the lounge, and a glass or two of cognac. We reminded him of his own pre-marital escapades, I suppose. Now he had lovers on a more soberly organised basis. It was, I came to see more and more, a good life.

And then Carlo goes and falls in love. And I find myself playing the respectable English friend at his fiancée's apartment, evening after evening, instead of chucking some beautiful black-haired mouse under the chin in a night spot along the coast. It happened on my third visit. He stopped knocking on the door of my suite at about six each evening, to ask me, 'Coming for a ride?', with that lazy yet brilliant smile that made the distaff side of Lisbon weak in the knees. Now I found myself sharing my evenings with the family, trying to make out what the television was saying behind the household uproar, and it was in a foreign language anyway. Or I went to the night spot alone, at tremendous expense to myself,

since without him I didn't get the royal discount. That's the rich all over---they don't even have to pay their bills. It wasn't that I minded going to Maria Teresina Bianca's place in Lisbon's best district to drink coffee and listen to pop records. I liked Maria. But I had an ugly feeling she didn't like me. She had a way of cutting with her tongue that could have sliced a bar of steel. And it was done in a New England accent---she had colleged at Bryn<sup>m</sup>awr. She stood slightly taller than Carlo, and had a fine golden neck and bold eyes, her skin so perfect you couldn't believe it even while you were staring at it, a porous amalgam of sea and sun and the finest food money could buy. I suppose I was a little in love with her myself. But I didn't like her being one or two centimetres taller than my friend. It was somehow like a surrender on his part. On the other hand, one look below her chin-line and you could understand his point of view. She had the most provocatively superb bosom I had ever seen, at least for the moment I was looking at it. But I don't think even this was what made him put the engagement ring on her finger---after all, he had seen bosoms enough. It was papa. And the fact that she had some of the/<sup>city's</sup>bluest blood in her veins. That was what made Carlo say he had fallen in love with her. Some love! I could see that by midnight <sup>on</sup> ~~at~~ the last day of his honeymoon he would be back in his Ma<sup>er</sup>erait-Citroen purring down the Lisbon highway on his way to another bird (I hoped with me). Once he'd popped a little son in the oven.

Her voice was husky and deliberate and bold like her eyes. She meant to get her man. And no one was going to stand in her way. You could see it written in the points of her lovely eyes. Also, she never said the kind of things

that most of the other Lisbon girls said. I mean frankly they were provincial-minded and she wasn't. She'd been around. She'd even been married! I simply couldn't understand how a devout catholic<sup>l</sup>ike papa could stomach Carlo marrying a divorced woman, until I discovered that she not only had blue blood, her father was one of Lisbon's supermarket kings. And there hadn't been a divorce. Her marriage had been annulled, after her father had made a number of charitable endowments to the local monastery, and it had been found that the marriage had never been 'consummated', a most unlikely thing, in view of her appearance, unless her husband was a monk, and even then a very old one. I noticed time and again that Carlo just didn't want to know the truth about Maria, even the fact that she stood a centimetre taller in her stockings.

I swear I would have been putty in her fingers too, had she wanted me. Maria Teresina was EXCITING! A dark, fertile warmth poured out of her. I realised just how fertile when Carlo told me she was two-months pregnant. He let me into the secret while doing 150 kilometres an hour along the Lisbon highway. And did papa know? I asked him. Sure! Sure papa knew! I began to wonder whose child it was. But I didn't dare ask. Even the catholic church couldn't have called Maria's first marriage unconsummated with that kind of evidence behind the oven doors. It looked to me as if Carlo, the poor sap, was being taken for the longest ride in the history of the Iberian peninsula, by his own father! I wouldn't have been surprised to hear that Maria was one of his father's birds. In fact, that was quite a

good idea. I mean, what better way of trying out future wives for his son? And if the child was his, why, it was still an heir! But I smarted for Carlo. We'd had such good nights together. No wonder she gave him an anxious look every time he and I walked down to his car together, on the way home. I think she felt how much I was against ~~the~~ <sup>the marriage. And</sup> ~~it.~~ <sup>well,</sup> being an honest sort of cove, I found it difficult to hide what I felt. She must have seen the blame in my eyes, when I inwardly accused her of putting a stop to those lovely <sup>summer</sup> ~~long~~ nights roaming the seacoast with her future husband, laden or unladen with birds as the mood took us. Yes, I had enjoyed those easy hours of darkness within sound of the sea more than anything I could remember in my ~~whole~~ life! A cool drink in one hand and a cool girl in the other, while Carlo talked on half in English and half in rapid Portuguese, punctuating what he said with his <sup>1</sup> ~~brief~~ cascading laugh that made me as well as the girls giddy with excitement. And we had plenty to talk about apart from the girls too. He knew London and most other cities like the back of his hand, he'd been to Harvard <sup>for</sup> a year, he knew how ~~to~~ to fly. He was the finest friend I ever had. Oh I'd had friends but it wasn't the same. Carlo and I shared everything. One night we drove across to Spain and spent all night in an army headquarters with ear-splitting manoeuvres going on all round us. The brigadier in charge was a relative of his on his mother's side. Then we drove down to Granada, where we had a bath and a huge breakfast and a dip in the pool at a fabulous house belonging to the brigadier's ~~dister~~ sister. Then we went up the hills on donkey back, and lunched on onions and goat cheese. We slept in a sheep-pen in

sleeping bags. There's nothing like friendship. I mean the adventure. The kind of safe feeling you get in marriage doesn't come up to it, and anyway I don't know if the opposite sexes can be friends like that. Carlo and I even shared our girls. It seemed the natural thing to do. The girls didn't seem to mind either. It was a great life, without jealousy or pettiness or back-looking. I hoped it would last for ever. And Maria Teresina Bianca comes along and spoils it all. I tell you, being with Carlo was like living a legend. Until then I just didn't know what life was capable of. And I'd already seen some, done some---from sleeping in an ice-igloo to duck-shooting in the Pennsylvanian marshes. But Carlo hadn't been there.

One evening---it was August and the sun was just going down, bringing the first cool breeze of the day---Carlo knocked on my door and said huskily, with his usual wink, 'Come on'. I had just taken a bath, and I quickly threw ~~shirt~~ on a dark-blue shirt with polka dots and a featherweight white suit I had picked up in Rome the previous week. In less than ten minutes we were licking the hell out of the highway on the way to Maria's, not to a night spot as I had thought and hoped from the sound of his voice. He had a question<sup>to</sup> ask me, he said. What did I really think about their marrying? And he looked me full in the face, sideways, leaving the car to look after itself for a few hair-raising seconds. It was just the question I had been waiting for. And I had the answer ready. 'As a matter of fact, I'd advise against it, Carlo, I mean you're going to Goa for a couple of years, you'll find a lot of girls there and by the time you get back to civilian life you'<sup>ll</sup> have changed, I mean your tastes.'

It was an argument that had come to me out of the blue. I was amazed it had never occurred to me before. He was due to go in ~~to~~ the army as a conscript, and everyone knew he would be doing two years' station duty in India. But all he said was, 'You mean you don't think she's beautiful?' 'She's lovely!' 'And intelligent?' he asked, going on to answer his own question, 'She's got a degree, she reads books, she paints and she plays the piano---' 'Yes,' I said, 'she's certainly a very clever girl'. 'You don't think she'd make a good mother?' 'I think she'd make a marvellous mother'. 'Then you've answered my question,' he said, and accelerated from a mere 140 kilometres an hour to 190.

I wasn't fooled by the speed. It was clear to me that he felt some uncertainty about the whole thing. Otherwise why should he ask me? I decided it was necessary for me to save him. Perhaps that was what he was really asking me to do! I should talk to papa maybe, put a sober point of view, that of an outsider! I realised all of sudden that Carlo was my ideal of the unmarried friend. Once spliced, the first thing he'd do would be to drive safely. Bit by bit his personality would ~~slip away~~ <sup>fall to dust.</sup> She'd pick him up from the office in the family car in the evening, with the kids. He'd even have to work. It was the end of a dream. And, since it was my dream, I intended to see it didn't happen.

This was a special night. It wasn't exactly an engagement party. The ring had gone on her finger long ago. It was just for close friends, to announce their marriage. In a week's time. Before he pushed off to Goa. And there was I thinking that papa had bought him exemption from military service for at least another six months! His

disappearance<sup>a</sup> to Goa was the lesser of two evils by far, especially as I was often enough in India myself and would be able to see him almost as frequently as I did now. But marriage in a week's time! No wonder his voice had been husky.

There were flowers all over the apartment, and the smell of flowering jasmine from the balcony-gardens outside, and extra servants with white gloves, and a buffet supper, and soft music, and low lights, and a handful of unattached lovely females for unattached lovely males like me: it was just how you'd expect Maria Tersina to organise things. I began to see that these little parties of hers would go on during his two years' absence. I mean, it seemed obvious. She was just that sort of girl. I'm not saying she was a whore. She was much too clever for that. She chose her targets in the upper income brackets, and shot her arrows with unflinching accuracy. You could see the calculation shining in her eye, and at first you took it for a faraway look.

But imagine my surprise when all of a sudden she moved over towards me like a Sixth Fleet cruiser on Mediterranean manoeuvres---glittering and hushed and leaving a cool frothy wake behind her. Glass in hand. Earrings tinkling. 'Well, hullo', she said, then pressed my hand and placed all of herself very close to all of me: 'Listen, I'd like a quiet talk. Come with me'. And she linked arms in such a way that I could feel her besom, and <sup>she</sup> drew me out of the lounge, with its carrots-carrots murmur of talk, to a little dressing-room with a divan bed and plenty of cushions and no light at all as far as I could see, only open french windows looking

out on the lights of the city. 'Now I'm going to get you a drink', she said as I sat myself down, and the tone of her voice suggested ~~polite~~ rape. In a jiffy a maid with a white apron had put iced drinks down on the coffee table before us, and Maria Teresina had rendered up her empty glass. She sat down close at my side. She opened an <sup>ivory-</sup>inlaid box of cigarettes and offered me one. I lit hers with a golfball lighter (solid gold?) that I found on the table, and we leaned back with comfortable sighs. I swore she knew I was dying to be next door with those unattached lovelies, and she determined to make up for that desire with some instant squeezery. In just a little less than a thousandth of a second she had me consigning the next-door lovelies to hell. She drew my arm round her, and nestled towards me so that what little of her had hitherto been covered was now uncovered. I could see there was nothing like her.

'Listen', she said, 'you could help me a lot'. I was all ears. 'I hear you've been advising Carlo not to marry me,' she went on, 'and I think you're dead right'. You could have pitched me out of the french windows with a feather. I could do no more than stutter silently. 'You do?' I managed to get out in a cracked voice. I settled down to the squeezing with pleasure, and gave her a big smile in the darkness, our noses almost touching. 'First of all', she said, 'I'm not going to sit here for two years waiting for him to come back from Goa. What's the point of getting married and then separating for two years?' 'You couldn't be less wrong,' I said. 'He might come back with completely changed ideas. And your ideas might change too,' I added, 'remember that'. 'Listen', she said, getting ~~as~~ close as

she could without actually sitting on me, 'I think you've got the wrong angle on all this. It's Carlo's idea, all this marriage-stuff, not mine. I mean I like him, he's a great guy to go out with and all that but, God, I've only just got out of one marriage, I don't want to be pushed into another!'

I was beginning to like Maria Teresina. More and more. And I was also beginning to realise why Carlo had squeezed a 3000-dollar ring on her finger. She was irresistible! With her on your side you could get any place you wanted to. 'I'd like to tell you something really private,' she said, glancing round the door to see no one was there. Music came drifting through from the other room. A couple was talking on the balcony. 'But first of all can I trust you?' she asked. 'Of course you can'. 'You promise not to tell a soul?' 'Of course I promise', I said. 'Well', she said, 'you can't see yet, but I'm pregnant. I spent most of the summer with a man. He's much older than Carlo, in fact twice as old. He's a Jewish business-man. He isn't Portuguese. It was abroad, you see. I went abroad to forget my first husband. And it's his child---' 'Your husband's?' I asked with alarm. 'No, no, this Jewish business-man's. And I suppose I'm in love with him. I've thought about it for a long time. But I need someone his age. I'm not after his money or anything, though he is a very rich man. It's just that he makes me feel secure in every way and Carlo doesn't. So now you know everything.' And she leaned all her softness on me. When she turned her head and whispered, 'Well, what do you think of me?' there was only one thing to say, 'I think you're marvellous'.

I could feel her breath on my cheek. Her lips almost touched me. 'I'd tell Carlo myself,' she said, 'but my reputation here couldn't stand it. At least, not until I'm safely married again. I haven't even dared to tell my father. You know, it's pretty provincial here.' 'It's a problem,' she went on with a kind of soft gloom that was deliciously in need of consolation. 'What do you suggest?'

'I think you've got to tell Carlo that the thing's off. Tell him you think I'm right, and you both should wait until he gets back from Goa. That'll let him down lightly. Once he's out there he'll find plenty of girls to keep him amused.'

She shifted, turning her whole weight round to look me straight in the eyes.

'You think he will?' she asked, her voice suddenly louder than before.

'Do I think so, I know so!' I said. 'They come running at a snap of his fingers.'

'But how do you know?'

'I've spent weeks with him, haven't I, doing the clubs? It's a job to keep them off sometimes. He's like one of those pilot fish. He's always got a trail behind him.'

'And you'll be seeing him in Goa, do you think?'

'Oh sure! Listen, you leave it to me. If there's a female Goan under forty who goes to clubs, he'll know her.'

'I can so well imagine the two of you together,' she said. She kissed me lightly, letting the very edges of her lips linger on my cheek while she added, 'I dare say there are very few Lisbon girls you two haven't tried, one way or another'.

'Well,' I said, turning so that my lips were fully on

hers for a moment, 'you could count them on one hand. Are you jealous?'

'No', she whispered, kissing me again, just the tips of her lips, 'just very expectant.' Then she stirred and whispered again, 'Don't you think we'd better join the others?'

'OK'.

The next-door lovelies could have been a thousand miles away for all I cared. I only had eyes for Maria Teresina. I expected <sup>her</sup> to move over to Carlo and begin spilling the beans to him. But she didn't. She let him kiss her, she looked right into his eyes with what I could have sworn was a happy smile. Not once did I let her out of my sight. It began to worry me. If she didn't tell him, someone else would have to! And that someone else would be me. I wasn't going to let my best friend walk into that blindfolded! But then she smiled across at me, and it felt different. A magnum of champagne was opened, and we began to collect our platefuls of food from the buffet table. I felt definitely good: I'd been proved right. And I'd found a marvellous girl for when Carlo was away in the army! Yes! The whole thing <sup>was</sup> suddenly <sup>clear</sup> ~~occurred~~ to me! She was transferring her loyalty <sup>to me!</sup> I didn't believe in the Jewish business-man, and maybe even the baby wasn't true! She just wanted me to keep her warm while Carlo was away! And I would. After Carlo had been put in the picture. It wouldn't be the first girl we'd shared, after all. The champagne swam round my head, after the hard liquor that had gone before. Really I didn't know what to think. I couldn't sort it all out. All I knew was that she seemed to need me, and I certainly needed her.

It was a wonderful evening. The last wonderful evening, as a matter of fact, that I spent in Lisbon or even ~~in~~ Portugal. Carlo and I drove back <sup>as</sup> tight as owls, and arrived in the gravel courtyard singing. Papa was waiting in the lounge with his usual benign smile and a couple of brandies. It didn't matter that we woke the whole household. That was our male prerogative. We settled into our armchairs, laughing. Then I realised that there was nothing, for the moment, to laugh about, and that I had a duty to perform. At first I thought, let it go, leave it to fate. And after all I'd promised her not <sup>to</sup> say a word. But honest-cove feelings welled up in me. How could I ~~even~~ permit my friend to go on deluding himself? Or papa either, for that matter? And I suddenly found myself talking. I told them about the Jewish business-man first. Then about how he was the father of her child. They sat listening to me in silence. Encouraged by this attention I told them more or less everything she had said, down to where she'd given me the glad eye and our lips had brushed. After all, I was talking to men. Papa gazed long and steadily at his son, his expression fixed and unchanging, giving nothing away. They left their brandies untouched. I realised what a shock it all was. I felt as sorry as they obviously were, and I joined in their silence. It sounded like a memorial service, without singing.

I told them how she hoped to marry the Jewish friend, and planned to do so while Carlo was away in Goa. She was going to let him down lightly, I said, by suggesting a postponement---'so be prepared to hear her say she'd ~~still~~ like time to think it over', I added to Carlo, looking right in

his eyes. Again a long silence. Neither of them moved. You could have heard a ghost walking. And little wonder. But I felt better for it. The truth, I thought, does you good---it sets the blood flowing again.

'And who told you all this,' papa asked in a very slight voice, putting the tips of his fingers together.

'Why of course, she did'.

'This evening?'

'Yes. She asked me to say nothng naturally. But I've got my duty to Carlo'.

'And she has her duty to the Jewish father of her child, no doubt,' papa said with a really frost-bitten smile towards his son.

Carlo jumped up---with a really athletic bound that placed him in a kind of military posture, to attention.

'We'd better get to bed,' he said.

I said good night to papa and he simply nodded. Carlo and I walked upstairs slowly.

Outside my bedroom he stood and looked at me.

'Of course you're joking aren't you?' he said, not troublng to lower his voice.

'I wish I was. Listen', I said, 'she's just another girl. Think of her like that!' I smiled. 'I tell you what, I'll even keep her warm for you while you're away in Goa!'

He stood staring at me, quite still, not a flicker on his face. Then he said, 'You will, will you?' And he walked away to his bedroom down the corridor.

Well, I hadn't expected him to dance with joy. I heard papa talking to the servants below in what sounded to

me rather harsh tones. Then I went to bed. I gazed out at the Atlantic from my pillows, and drifted off into an easy sleep.

The sleep didn't last long. Just before dawn came through I was woken with a start by the white-haired butler. He was standing at the foot of my bed. I asked him what the trouble was, and he said, 'I have instructions to pack your bags sir'.

'Oh, why?'

He simply moved towards the wardrobe and started *packing*. Then the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, grappling with it in a dazed way from my bed. It was the chauffeur. He said he had instructions to take me to a hotel or the airport right away, whichever I preferred. I said, 'Neither, I want to see Mr Carlo.' Apparently neither Carlo nor papa was available. They had 'gone away'. And the car was waiting in the courtyard. I lay there feeling as if the whole world was sitting on my face. I bathed and dressed slowly while my bags went downstairs. No breakfast appeared. Not even a cup of coffee. I began to tell myself that after all I had a wife and kid and a nice home, what was I to worry about? I'd told the truth, and these people didn't like the truth. So they could stuff themselves. Words to that effect. But I felt bad. I felt like a depth-charge with<sup>^</sup>out the fuse, just sinking and sinking to the bottom of the sea with nothing to say for itself except air-bubbles.

When I got downstairs it seemed that the house had all of a sudden lost its occupants. Of course it was rather early still. But there wasn't even a cook in the kitchen.

The cases were already in the boot. Then I was whisked away---I'd decided on the Hotel Metropole, for just one night, while I sorted out my thoughts and booked a flight to my next port of call, Amsterdam. I could imagine how all this was going to affect my business in Lisbon too. In a matter of hours papa had withdrawn his account. I felt that L.A. was a place to keep away from for a few months, while I built up credit somewhere else. I knew I could do it. That wasn't really what worried <sup>me</sup> It was the thought that I'd lost the best friend I ever had.

A couple of hours later, while I am breakfasting in my hotel room, a note arrives from Carlo advising me to hold my liquor better in the future. And next time I wanted to suggest that his future wife was a whore, would I mind not inventing a Jew as her lover, as both he and papa happened to detest Jews? I might like to know, too, that he and Maria Teresina Bianca were marrying in a week from now, and that ~~she would be accompanying him to Goa as they had always planned.~~ <sup>even</sup> And if I was the last person on the globe I wouldn't be invited. ~~to their wedding.~~ He was 'real sorry' for what had happened but the whole thing had been 'too distasteful to be considered a joke'. It was papa, he said, who had insisted on throwing me out of the house---in fact he had reported all my 'filthy stories' to Maria Teresina and forbidden either of them further contact with me. As for my promising to keep Maria Teresina warm for him for two years it wouldn't be necessary as they would be setting up home in Goa, as they had planned all along. He said he was sure I would see the reason for their distress, once I'd thought about it 'in the cold light of day'. Also,

'a real man' didn't tell a friend's wife about all the girls he'd had. 'Although I'd still like to call you my friend I know, I can't because you have no honour.'

And that was that. Oh, and I got a note from Maria Teresina too. She just wanted to say how appalled she ~~had~~<sup>was</sup> ~~been~~ to hear from Carlo's father about all 'the filthy stories' I had been telling about her. She ~~was~~ writing this note to assure <sup>me</sup> that she was the proud mother of Carlo's child, and that she had never loved a man as she loved Carlo, and that it seemed to her that Carlo had ridded himself of a dangerous friend just in time.

They did marry. The child was born. A son, as they had hoped. Looking the spitten image of Carlo. Grand festivities at the house. Maria Teresina did go to Goa with him. I heard it all from the guy who took over my Portuguese file. I told headquarters exactly what had happened---there was no point in beating about the bush--- and there were some laughs. They came to the conclusion that Maria Teresina was a very clever girl well worth marrying. They advised me, since I was such an honest chap, ~~for~~ to go home and tell my wife the whole story. I didn't have to. Carlo did. In a long letter. About all the girls we'd had too. 'An honest cove like me,' I thought rather bitterly.